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RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV PRIORITY 0058
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RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1237

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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: ANTI-ISRAEL PROTESTERS DETAINED-- SOME RELEASED

Classified By: Political-Economic Chief Rob Garverick, for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: On January 2 approximately 150-200 people, largely young religious people, attempted to protest Israel's actions in Gaza outside the Israeli Embassy in Baku. About 150 were temporarily detained, and 25 were charged with violations of the administrative code. Journalists and reporters say violent force was used to break up the protest. Those sentenced to short terms in prison have begun to be released on schedule. This incident highlights the continued negative trend with regards to freedom of assembly in Azerbaijan. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) On January 2 a group of approximately 150-200 people attempted to protest outside Israel's Embassy in Baku regarding the current military actions in Gaza. Protesters claim their intentions were entirely peaceful. The attempted protest was broken up by police, however, and several protesters, including journalists covering the event, claim they were beaten by police. Approximately 150 of the protesters were detained by police and forced to sign a written statement, and then all but 25 of them were released.

¶3. (C) The 25 persons detained for longer than a few hours were charged with violations of article 310 of the administrative code, which prohibits "deliberate insubordination to legal demands of military or police." Five of the 25 were released later in the day of January 2, but the other twenty were given sentences ranging from ten to fourteen days (this is the maximum allowed under the law). It is unclear why these particular participants were charged, although human rights defender Elchin Behbudov claims that the twenty had all completed the Hajj. Behbudov also stated that the detainees did not complain of any torture while they were held in jail, but insist that their detention was illegal as their protest was peaceful.

¶4. (C) On January 8 the Israeli Embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission Yehudit Galilee-Metzer told an Embassy Official that that her Embassy had not seen the protesters and had no interaction with the GOAJ about their detention. She said the GOAJ had stepped up protection of their Embassy on their own initiative.

¶5. (SBU) On January 12 the seven detainees given ten day sentences were released on schedule. It is expected that the remaining thirteen detainees will be released on schedule on January 16.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) While this protest may have been illegal under the revised Law on Freedom of Assembly if it was within 200 meters of the Israeli Embassy, the allegations of improper use of force, especially against journalists not participating in the protest, are alarming. Despite government claims to the contrary, the protest appears to have been peaceful, and the protesters did not appear to present any direct threat to the Israeli Embassy. The appearance that certain protesters were targeted for arrest because of religious activity is disturbing, and could be a case of over-reach by local authorities. No matter what the issue, GOAJ authorities seem to have little appetite for protests.

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